



Public Education in Saskatchewan – What questions should we be asking?

Public Schools of Saskatchewan (also known as the Public Section of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association)

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The Public Schools of Saskatchewan believes in an inclusive, open school system to meet the needs of students. We are passionate about public education and the impact of schools on the lives of students. Public education is about facilitating growth for all students. So how do we ensure the future of open, inclusive education? An election campaign could be an important time to review priorities and see what is possible.

During the coming provincial election campaign, we need to ask questions of political parties about how they perceive the importance of public education in Saskatchewan. This questioning is especially important because public schools are the only schools that accept all students that come to our doors with no questions or exceptions.

Public school boards embrace our mandate to open our schools to every child, no matter where they live. Our schools are open to students of all races, religions, economic circumstances, political outlooks, intellect and physical abilities. In public schools, children and youth of every description and interest are educated together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Knowledge is gained by achieving an understanding of the diverse cultures, customs and beliefs within the school and community.

For the Public Schools of Saskatchewan — a group of 17 public school boards across the province that educate about 137,000 students (over 70% of all Saskatchewan students) — an appropriately funded public education system is the cornerstone of our democratic society; everyone benefits when citizens are educated. Equally important is that public schools are open to, and accepting of, every student no matter who they are or where they live; inclusion and diversity are hallmarks of public schools.

In addition to the challenge of adequate funding, public school board autonomy has been undermined by numerous directives from the province dictating how divisions will operate. Locally elected trustees are accountable to their voters and communities and should be granted the independence to do their jobs.

One issue that directly relates to the funding of public education is the continued provincial support of private, often religious-based schools. Every tax dollar spent on independent or private schools is a dollar taken away from public schools.

We believe it's a false argument that government-funded independent schools provide families with 'choice' in education. In fact, these schools are an 'option' available only to those with the means to pay tuition and transport their children to school. The result is public money being spent on schools that are not open to the public, only to those who can afford them. We argue that parents who want their children to have private or religious-based education should pay for it themselves.

Public schools in our province need every dollar possible to overcome years of funding shortfalls. Syphoning off tax dollars to fund independent schools simply exacerbates the problem, particularly when every student attending an independent school would be warmly welcomed in a public one.

School divisions have done tremendous work developing policies and programs that best meet the needs of their communities and the students they serve, and they should have the funding and autonomy to do what they need to do. School divisions exist to meet diverse needs across our diverse province. The more the province supports the work of school divisions, the more local input will be respected and we believe our students will benefit.

Ask political parties about funding for public education. Ask about whether they are willing to give boards the autonomy to make decisions for the students that they serve. Ask if they will discontinue funding for private and independent schools.

How will the parties deal with education during the next legislative session and beyond? Please ask the questions.

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